Dalits and the Right to Food - Discrimination and Exclusion in Food-related Government Programmes

Sukhadeo Thorat
Joel Lee

Working Paper Series
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Mission and Goals

The primary goals of the Indian Institute of Dalit Studies among its many tertiary objectives are:

A. Undertaking interdisciplinary research on (a) the forms, nature and dynamics of discrimination and exclusion of the marginalized social groups; (b) their consequences on the social, cultural, economic and political conditions; (c) on developing inclusive policies against discrimination and inequalities and for the economic, social and political empowerment of the marginalized social groups;

B. To provide knowledge support to the Government, the NGOs and other organizations working at local, regional, national and international levels;

C. To provide research inputs to policymaking and other related bodies; and

D. To serve as a Resource Center for researchers, students, activists and policymakers.

Christian Aid (India) has provided support for the printing of this working paper and this is gratefully acknowledged.

The IIDS Working Paper Series disseminate the findings of the core research outputs of the Institute to facilitate informed discussions among the civil society, the academia, researchers and also strive to contribute towards policy infusions.
Dalits and the Right to Food – Discrimination and Exclusion in Food-related Government Programms

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Foreword

The Indian Institute of Dalit Studies has initiated this Working Paper Series for the first time. This Working Paper on Discrimination and Exclusion in Food-related Government Programmes is the third in the series. The purpose of this Series is to disseminate and share the findings of the core research concerns of the Institute for a wider circulation, and to facilitate informed discussions on a variety of focal issues.

The Working Paper Series disseminates both, empirical and theoretical findings of the ongoing research on issues pertaining to the forms and nature of social exclusion and discrimination, caste and untouchability-based discrimination, and inclusive policies for the marginalized social groups in Indian society and in other countries etc.

It is hoped that the Working Paper Series will be beneficial to researchers, students, academics, and activists alike, and will also benefit policymaking bodies and civil society organizations.

This Working Paper “Dalits and the Right to Food - Discrimination and Exclusion in Food-related Government Programmes” elucidates the preponderance of the continuing practices of caste and untouchability-based discrimination and exclusion in the Government food programmes, namely, the Mid-day Meal Scheme and the Public Distribution System. It brings out the latent and manifest forms of caste prejudices that operate in the functioning of these programmes, and highlights the entrenched ways in which discrimination pervades the right to food.

This Working Paper is based on the findings of an Indian Institute of Dalit Studies survey conducted in collaboration with the National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights in 531 villages within 30 districts across 5 states (Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu) of India. Importantly, this Working Paper developed qualitative tools to ascertain the levels of physical access the Dalits had to these two food security programmes; the degree to which they participated in their administration; and the nature of community-level access to each program. The Working Paper also accentuates on the actual location of these food security programmes, and brings to the fore, the intangible behavioral aspects of discrimination and social exclusion in their implementation. Finally, it suggests institutional forms for the promotion of improved access to food security programmes.

The Indian Institute of Dalit Studies is particularly indebted to Colin Gonsalves of Combat Law and Paul Divakar of National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights for their comments and suggestions.

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Dalits and the Right to Food - Discrimination and Exclusion in Food-related Government Programmes

Sukhadeo Thorat & Joel Lee

1. Introduction

1.1 The Problem

As a customary system of social and economic governance based on graded hierarchy, caste in the Indian society exists in tension with the legal systems of the State, which are based on the ideals of liberty and equality. The Dalits*, who constitute almost one-fifths of the Indian population, suffer most acutely from social and economic violence emanating from the caste system, which prescribes their position as being uniquely located at the bottom of the graded caste hierarchy. The Dalits in the Indian society negotiate social and economic transactions in many spheres of life from this inherited position at the abyss of the caste pyramid, while in the other spheres, untouchability excludes them from transactions with the dominant community.

Recognizing that caste discrimination and exclusion, particularly, against the Dalits, continues to thrive, and acknowledging that such discrimination and exclusion contradicts the claims of the Indian Constitution, the Central Government has over the years, enacted various anti-discriminatory measures and legislations intended to redress these problems. The Protection of Civil Rights (PCR) Act, 1976 and the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes Prevention of Atrocities Act (POA), 1989 acknowledged the existing forms of discrimination and exclusion, and introduced legal measures to eradicate them. A system of reservations in Government employment and Government educational institutions etc. has also been enacted with the intent of redressing conventional caste-based discrimination and exclusion in State-controlled sectors. In response to the growing Right to Food movement in the recent years, the Supreme Court following the Constitution stipulated
that the Central Government, when introducing new food-related schemes should include specific provisions for the prevention of caste-based discrimination and exclusion in the implementation of such programs.

Conventional caste forces, however, are often able to subvert, evade, hijack, and even manipulate the progressive legal framework of the State, nullifying the transformative potential of its anti-discriminatory measures. Even in Government schemes, designed specifically for the welfare of the traditionally discriminated communities, the members of such communities, often, find themselves excluded, both from participation and partnership in the implementation of such schemes, as well as, from the tangible and intangible benefits of the schemes. This is notably the case in Right to Food-related Government programs such as the Mid-day Meal Scheme (MMS) and the targeted Public Distribution System (PDS).

1.2 Objectives

The Indian Institute of Dalit Studies (IIDS) undertook a study to unravel caste-based discrimination and exclusion against the Dalits, specifically in the implementation of the Right to Food-related Government welfare schemes. While violent atrocities, and other egregious violations of the human rights of the Dalits have received some (warranted) attention in recent years, the area of discrimination in Government programs remains an inconspicuous, and relatively neglected area of study.

The purpose of the IIDS study was to obtain an accurate, current, and ground-level view of how, where, and to what extent caste-based discrimination and exclusion operate in Government programs as they are implemented in villages across India. Specifically, such an examination entailed:

- Access - Can the Dalits access the benefits of the Government schemes?
- Participatory empowerment and ownership - To what degree are the Dalits able to participate meaningfully in the implementation of the schemes, from ‘having a say’ to ‘having ownership stakes in the schemes’ material capital?
- Treatment - Are the Dalits treated fairly, and on equal terms with dominant caste communities in the implementation of the schemes?
1.3 Methodology

Questionnaire Format

In order to assay caste-based discrimination and exclusion in the MMS and PDS, a questionnaire was developed for undertaking a survey in the identified villages with an aim to ascertain the degree of ‘access to’, ‘participatory empowerment and ownership of’, and ‘treatment in’, both the Government programs for the Dalits. Originally, the study, besides delving into the MMS and PDS components also conceived a detailed analysis of addressing the distribution of Below Poverty Line (BPL) ration cards; problems of translation and divergent regional applicability, however, rendered the data from this component unusable. The complete questionnaire, however, with answer codes, is included as Annexure I.

Clarification of the Terms

In this study, ‘exclusion’ means prohibition from participation, whereas, ‘discrimination’ denotes participation with a negative distinction. To illustrate with instances from the study, in Kamalaputhur village in Tamil Nadu, the dominant caste community jeered at, and expelled a Dalit girl from the government school when she tried to participate in the mid-day meal - such instances, typify ‘exclusion’ of the Dalit children in the MMS. Similarly, in Enumalavaripalli village in Andhra Pradesh, though the Dalit children participate in the MMS, but they are required to sit separately from the dominant caste children, typifying caste ‘discrimination’. While the two phenomena clearly share a great deal in common (for instance, both are illegal, and result in detrimental psychological and psychosomatic effects on the children at the receiving end), they are nonetheless, distinct and therefore, were considered individually, as well as, jointly in the analysis of each of the Government programs.

Indicators for Measuring Caste-based Discrimination and Exclusion

How does one measure caste-based discrimination and exclusion? and What possible indicators can be used for such an analysis? As mentioned above, the categories of analysis, through which caste-based discrimination and exclusion will be identified and examined in this paper, are ‘access to’; ‘participatory empowerment and ownership of’; and ‘treatment in’ both the Government programs. What, then, are the quantifiable indicators of access in both the Government schemes, i.e., the MMS and the PDS?
Existence of the Schemes

Is there a functioning MMS in the government school in your village? and Is there a PDS shop in your village? ‘Access to’ Government programs are first and foremost predicated on the existence of the said schemes at the local levels.

Location of the Schemes

Is the MMS held in the school; on the premises of a temple; in an exclusively dominant caste locality; in a Dalit colony; or elsewhere? Is the PDS shop situated in the Dalit colony; or in a dominant caste locality; or elsewhere? Where the Dalits are forbidden to enter dominant caste localities, or face restrictions on mobility and intimidation in dominant caste localities - the location of the PDS shops and the MMS centers becomes a crucial factor in determining the degree of Dalit access to such programs.

Distance of the Schemes from the Dalit Colonies

The distance that children have to walk in order to reach schools serving the mid-day meals, or the distance that the adults have to walk in order to access the Government PDS shops, critically affect the access of the Dalits to such schemes, especially, in spread-out rural areas.

Subjective Responses to Questions of Access

Are any children rejected or left out of the MMS on account of their caste backgrounds? and Is any Dalit prohibited access to the PDS shops on account of her/his caste?

The measurable indicators of participatory empowerment and ownership of Government programs are:

- **Percentage of the Dalit cooks and organizers in the MMS** - What is the proportion of the MMS in which the cooks are Dalits to the total number of cooks? and What is the proportion of the MMS in which the organizers (those ultimately responsible for implementing the MMS), usually the teachers, sometimes the sarpanches (head of the local self-government), or the PDS dealers are Dalits to the total number of organizers?

- **Percentage of the Dalit PDS dealers** - What is the proportion of the Dalit PDS dealers to the total number of PDS dealers?
Subjective responses to questions of Participatory Empowerment and Ownership - Have the Dalit cooks in your village been denied employment in the MMS on account of their caste backgrounds? and Have the Dalit efforts to own and maintain a PDS shop in your village been thwarted because of caste-based discrimination?

The measurable indicators of ‘treatment’ in Government schemes include:

- **Seating and eating arrangements in the MMS** - Do the Dalit and the dominant caste children sit and eat together in the MMS? or Is some form of segregation being practiced?

- **Discriminatory procedures in the PDS distribution** - Do the Dalits and the dominant castes stand in separate queues at the PDS shops? and Does the PDS dealer practice discriminatory scheduling, for instance, separate timings or days for the Dalit customers?

- **Subjective responses to questions regarding treatment** - In the MMS in your village, do the Dalit children receive less or inferior food? and Does the PDS dealer in your village give preference to the dominant caste customers over the Dalit customers?

All of these indicators were used to identify and measure caste-based discrimination and exclusion in the survey data.

**Dalits as Respondents**

Following the view that victims of discrimination are their own best spokespeople, it was decided that the Dalit community should be the respondent to the IIDS survey questionnaire. In so far as, gender equity was concerned, it was decided that the voice of the Dalit women should be represented, and preference be given to organized Dalit women’s self-help groups (SHGs), wherever, they were found to exist in the survey areas. In the absence of such groups, or alongside them, interviews were held with the Dalit community as a whole, and on occasions with well-informed individual Dalit women and men in small groups or singularly. Teachers or other local officials were sought only for the confirmation of school enrollment figures.1

**Dalit Composition of Research Teams**

It is not just the Government studies on untouchability and caste-based discrimination, but also, those by well-intentioned academics and NGOs, which suffer congenitally from the lack of Dalit representation.
Two fundamental ground realities, one, the dominant caste; and two, the outsider composition of most research teams in studies of such sort, often, result in perpetuating a silencing effect on the Dalit voices. First, in a phenomenon with well-documented global correlates\(^2\), generations of psychological violence of caste have resulted in the Dalits internalizing oppressive dominant caste worldviews in many rural areas, such that, when pressed to represent their views on their own situation, many Dalits simply repeat self-denigrating, and dominant caste rationalizations of caste. Alternatively, some Dalits who may share critical views of their situation strictly among themselves, still represent the resigned, and self-effacing dominant caste trope when interacting with the dominant castes. Second, the Dalits also face the threat of retaliatory physical and economic violence associated with ‘speaking up’ (especially to outsiders), and acts of assertion. For these reasons, the dominant caste character of the research teams, indeed, may do more to silence the Dalit perspectives - and thereby, suppress or skew data - than all the intimidation of class, education, and gender that sensitive researchers sometimes take into account in their analyses.

In order to avoid such near-universal flaw in studies related to caste, it was decided that teams of Dalit researchers ‘known to’ and ‘trusted by’ the local Dalit communities should conduct the survey. In practical terms, this was affected by a partnership with the National Campaign on Dalit Human Rights (NCDHR), through whose constituent organizations and with IIDSs oversight, the survey was conducted. The researchers involved were the activists of Dalit women’s organizations, unions of agricultural labourers, other Community-based Organizations (CBOs), and NGOs, with whom the local Dalit communities were comfortable and able to communicate with a reduced fear of repercussions.

As a corollary, one might suspect that the use of Dalit research teams to interview Dalit respondents could give rise to exaggerated reports of caste discrimination in the context of the culture of permanent victimization and complaint cultivated by some NGOs and political leaders. Keeping in mind the above, individuals and NGOs that operate with such paradigms were not invited to conduct this survey. The data collection, moreover, was facilitated by evidence - nuanced, cautious, and community responses rather than by irresponsible and indiscriminate finger-pointing characteristic of complaint-culture NGOs.\(^1\) While the influence of complaint culture cannot be completely ruled out, none of its symptoms were evident in the data.
1.4 Geographical Spread

The survey was conducted in five states across India - Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Andhra Pradesh, and Tamil Nadu. The states of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar in the north and Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu in the south were selected on the grounds of population size. Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, incidentally, have the highest SC population among the north Indian states (West Bengal, which also has a sizable SC population was excluded as both, the NCDHR and the IIDS lacked sufficient institutional contacts to effectively conduct the survey in the state), while Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu have the highest SC population among the southern states. Drawn from each of the four states, between 100 and 200 villages were surveyed on the limitation of availability of research teams. Given the fact that the state governments of both, Uttar Pradesh and Bihar have failed, to date, to implement the hot and cooked MMS as required by the 2001 Supreme Court Order on the Right to Food; Rajasthan was added as a sample state, so as to supplement the data from the northern states, and make it comparable to that from the southern states.

During data processing, a number of completed questionnaires were found to be defective for one reason or the other, mostly related to incomplete data collection, and departure from the methodological norms stipulated for the study. The defective questionnaires, numbering 42, were excluded from the database (the detailed list of the same is given in Annexure II, along with reasons for their exclusion). Setting aside these exceptions, the final database comprised of 531 villages from 136 blocks in 30 districts across 05 states in India. In Rajasthan, 26 villages; in Uttar Pradesh, 120 villages; in Bihar, 95 villages; in Andhra Pradesh, 180 villages; and in Tamil Nadu, 100 villages were surveyed respectively.

With the exception of Rajasthan, in which only Ajmer district was selected for study, again due to the limitation of available organizational contacts, the research teams in each of the states selected districts and blocks considering, both geographical factors and demographic diversity. In Rajasthan, 26 villages in 02 blocks of Ajmer District; in Uttar Pradesh, 120 villages in 08 blocks of 05 districts (i.e. Baliya, Bareilly, Rampur, Lakhimpur Kheri, and Gazipur); in Bihar, 95 villages, 11 blocks in 05 districts (i.e. Buxar, Samastipur, Nawada, Patna, and Vaishali); in Andhra Pradesh, 180 villages,
81 blocks in 10 districts (i.e. Anantapur, Chittoor, Guntur, Khammam, Kurnool, Mahaboobnagar, Nalgonda, Nizamabad, Warangal, and West Godavari); and in Tamil Nadu, 100 villages, 24 blocks in 09 districts (i.e. Dindigul, Kanyakumari, Madurai, Sivagungai, Thanjavur, Theni, Thiruvanamalai, Tirunelveli, and Virudhinagar) were surveyed in that order.

The survey was formulated and distributed in April 2003, and conducted in all the above-mentioned states simultaneously, in late April, May, and early June of 2003.

1.5 Limitations

During the data collection process, two social factors were felt impinging upon and biasing data despite measures taken to reduce their anticipated interference.

First, the phenomenon of internalization of caste norms mentioned earlier has in many places resulted in an environment in which terms like ‘discrimination’ ring abstract, inapplicable, and foreign to survey respondents. Allappanur village in Thiruvanamalai district, Tamil Nadu, for example, provides us with a classic and a typical instance of such a norm. Asked whether there was caste-based discrimination in the MMS, the Dalit respondents replied negatively, and noted that there was no discrimination on the basis of caste. Subsequently, when asked about the seating arrangements in the MMS, the same Dalit respondents responded that their children have to sit separately from the dominant caste children. This proved a common pattern in the IIDS survey, applying, not only, to separate seating, but concomitantly, to other forms of discrimination in the MMS, as well as, in the PDS. Given the lack of development of critical social consciousness and basic human rights awareness, general survey questions with key words like ‘discrimination are unlikely to register positive responses, even if discrimination is commonplace, largely due to discrimination being a ‘normative’ phenomenon. Anticipating this phenomenon, the IIDS survey included particularizing follow-up questions to each of the questions on discrimination. Still, instances like the one above were commonplace in the data; suggesting that the phenomenon of internalization of caste-based discrimination as normative did indeed, depress the figures reported for discrimination in the study.
Second, as referred to earlier, the Dalit articulation of grievances, particularly, in the public fora or with outsiders, invites retaliatory violence from the dominant caste communities that stand to lose from such exposures. ‘Awareness of’ and ‘misinformation about’ the legal consequences of caste-based discrimination in the POA Act, or in other criminal legislations among the dominant castes and the Dalit communities; makes the visitation of research teams, social activists, and journalists etc., a potentially threatening event for the perpetrators of discrimination. Therefore, organized intimidation, threats, harassment, and sometimes, even bribery of the Dalits frequently precedes such visits, especially so when they are announced ahead of time. Since most of the Dalit communities lack the economically empowered social support base to counter such pressures; the threat of violence is, often, sufficient to silence discussions on sensitive caste issues among the Dalit community members and the outside visitors. In this manner, dominant caste solidarity, in both its inclusive or rewarding (for dominant caste members), and exclusive or threatening (for the Dalits) aspects; functions to suppress the mention of caste-based discrimination. While the hope for legal redressal ought to serve as an incentive for the Dalit victims of discrimination to speak up publicly; this incentive must then be weighed against the fear of violent reprisal, usually a more imminent prospect than interventions by the State to enforce social justice legislations.

The IIDS study, by employing locally strong Dalit NGOs, CBOs, and unions to conduct the survey, and by conducting the survey on unannounced visits; helped counteract the intimidation factor, and expanded the space and scope for free and candid expression for the views of the people interviewed. The limited success of these efforts, however, must also be acknowledged. Some researchers reported that intimidation and fear of the dominant caste retaliation continued to influence data collection, despite various precautions. In Uttar Pradesh, for example, instances of respondents ‘turning hostile’ in the course of interviews were not uncommon, and were, often, precipitated by the arrival of other community members (i.e., the dominant caste members and the Dalit ‘informers’) at the interview site. In this manner, several respondents, who had begun describing specific instances of caste-based discrimination retracted their statements, and subsequently, denied any experience of such discrimination. The intimidation factor, therefore, does appear to have biased the data to a degree in favor of the dominant caste establishment’s preferred viewpoints.
2. The Mid-day Meal Scheme

2.1 The Context

In November 2001, in response to a Public Interest Litigation (PIL) filed by the People’s Union of Civil Liberties (PUCL), Rajasthan, the Supreme Court of India ordered all state governments to implement the Central Government’s lagging National Programme of Nutritional Support to Primary Education (NPNSPE), 1995, providing free and cooked meals to all children in Government primary schools, within six months. In states where implemented, this program is popularly known as the MMS. In a blatant contravention to the Supreme Court Order, some states, notably, Bihar and Uttar Pradesh are yet to implement the MMS. Instead, they still continue with a program originally intended as a temporary and an intermediate step leading to the cooked mid-day meals, i.e., provision of a fixed quantity of dry rations on a monthly basis to children enrolled in government schools.

Issues of exclusion and caste-based discrimination do afflict the MMS precursor scheme of distribution of dry rations to children in government schools. However, as the IIDS survey was primarily directed towards cooked and shared mid-day meals; data from the three states selected for the study in which the MMS has been implemented (Rajasthan, Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu) will, nevertheless, provide us with substance for the ensuing discussion. Subsequently, manifestations of exclusion and discrimination evident in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh’s pre-MMS system of distribution of dry rations will also be discussed.

In sum, 531 villages were surveyed for the study; Bihar and Uttar Pradesh (the MMS non-implementing states) account for nearly, 225 of the villages, while Rajasthan, Andhra Pradesh, and Tamil Nadu (the MMS implementing states) account for the rest of the 306 villages surveyed. The scope of the ensuing discussion, then, is limited to 306 villages across three states: 26 in Rajasthan, 180 in Andhra Pradesh, and 100 in Tamil Nadu respectively. Since the number of villages surveyed per state varied considerably, most of the data pertaining to the discussion has been presented in the form of percentages, primarily for the purposes of comparison.

2.2 Approach

As discussed in the introduction, this working paper attempts to identify, and measure exclusion and caste-based discrimination using three thematic
categories of ‘access to’, ‘participatory empowerment and ownership’ and ‘treatment in’ the MMS and the PDS. In measuring the Dalits ‘access to’ the MMS (and more broadly, the Right to Food ideally enabled by the MMS), the following measurable indicators were used. First, the existence of the MMS – is there a functioning MMS in the village of the respondents? Second, the location of the MMS – is the MMS held at a place, which is equally accessible to the Dalit children, as it is to the dominant caste children? Third and finally, subjective comments on access - have the respondents any comments regarding the Dalit children’s access to the MMS in their respective villages?

To measure the Dalits ‘participatory empowerment and ownership of’ the MMS, the following measurable indicators were used. First, the proportion of the Dalit cooks to the total number of cooks - are the Dalits fairly represented among those employed by the respective states for the MMS cooking? This provides a pivotal point for discussion and analysis as the scheme was conceived with the intention of providing employment to the under-privileged sections, and more so, because the Dalits cooking for the dominant caste consumption, threaten the very fundamental nature and justificatory under-pinnings of the caste system (the Dalits are considered intrinsically ‘polluted’ and their contact ‘polluting’). Second, the proportion of the Dalit organizers to the total number of organizers - are the Dalits fairly represented among those employed by the respective states in decision-making authorities? Third, subjective comments on ‘participatory empowerment and ownership of’ the MMS by the Dalit community - do the respondents remark particularly, on the Dalit children’s or the adults’ degree of ‘ownership and participatory empowerment’ vis-à-vis the MMS?

Finally, to measure caste-based discrimination against the Dalits in terms of ‘treatment in’ the MMS; the seating or eating arrangement is used as a measurable indicator, with segregated arrangements of seating indicating discrimination and conversely, integrated arrangements indicating non-discrimination. To further substantiate the analysis, subjective comments by the respondents regarding preferential treatment or other informal methods of discrimination were also considered.
2.3 Findings

Access

Existence of a Functioning MMS

This was measured jointly by the responses to the first question of the IIDS survey, ‘is there a MMS in your village?’, the fourth question, ‘is the mid-day meal actually served every day? if not, then how many days per month is the mid-day meal actually provided?’ and the fifth question, ‘are the mid-day meals provided as hot, cooked meals or as uncooked meals?’

The results were positive. Out of the 306 villages surveyed, only 05 villages (03 in Andhra Pradesh and 02 in Tamil Nadu) reported that there had been a MMS, but had been closed. Of those, 01 village (in Tamil Nadu) reported that the cause of closure was the dominant castes opposition to the scheme as it would benefit the SC/ST children; 02 villages (01 each in Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu) reported that there was no initiative or leadership for the scheme; 01 village (in Andhra Pradesh) reported financial problems; and 01 village (in Andhra Pradesh) gave no reason for the closure of the MMS. The other 301 villages reported having a functioning MMS in which cooked food was prepared for every school day (See Table 1 A).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>There was but it closed</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rajasthan</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andhra Pradesh</td>
<td>177</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>180</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tamil Nadu</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>301</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>05</td>
<td>306</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Location of the MMS

The location of the MMS has two components - setting and locality. For setting, the survey asked, ‘where is the mid-day meal held?’ in the sense of, ‘in which sort of physical space is it held?’ with options of school, temple, public building, and other locations - please specify. In 93 percent of the respondent villages, the mid-day meal was held in the school building itself, while in another 03 percent the meal was held in another public building.
Only in 02 cases, both in Tamil Nadu, was the government mid-day meal programme being held in a temple, raising the immediate problem of exclusion for the Dalit children, who are generally forbidden entry into temples, as well as, for other non-Hindu children.

Table 1 B, Setting of the MMS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Where is the MMS meal held</th>
<th>Number of Villages</th>
<th>Percentage of Villages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School</td>
<td>285</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Temple</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public building</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total valid responses</td>
<td>305</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The second aspect of location probed into the locality of the program. This was explored by the survey question, ‘where is this space located?’ with options of SC colonies, the dominant caste colonies, and other locations. In all the 03 states; the location of the MMS in the Dalit colonies was less than 50 percent. However, there were considerable inter-state variations, with 46 percent in Andhra Pradesh having a significantly higher proportion than either Tamil Nadu (19 percent) or Rajasthan (12 percent).

One limitation of the survey pertains to the fact that, while the option of the ‘dominant caste village’ was intended to imply to an area inhabited by all the Non SC/STs (i.e., whether ‘upper castes’ or Backward Castes or Other Backward Castes; who despite being segregated amongst themselves, still share a common inhabiting space from which the Dalit colony, typically remains residentially segregated), and the option ‘other place’ was intended to imply some truly neutral place outside of caste colonies (for instance, on the roadside apart from the village). These intended meanings did not translate effectively while conducting the survey. Though some researchers and respondents could follow the intended meanings; the others understood ‘dominant caste village’ to imply only ‘upper caste’ neighborhoods and therefore, marked the MMS held in backward caste neighborhoods as ‘other place’. Therefore, the distinction between neutral, non-caste common space, and the space owned and occupied by the dominant castes (of whatever grade, since, typically, the segregation and exclusion of the Dalits is common to all the Non SC/STs) was thus, blurred. The conclusions drawn are evidently from the figures for the MMS held in the Dalit colonies only. Tables 1 C and Figure 1 A present this data, both in numerical and percentage forms respectively.
Though, the survey did not directly ask the respondents questions related to the distance of the location of the MMS from the Dalit colonies. However, while discussing the location of the MMS with the research teams; a number of respondents brought attention to distance as a factor that makes their children’s access to the MMS problematic. In 03 villages, all in Tamil Nadu, the respondents said that the Dalit children simply cannot participate in the MMS because of the school being too far from their homes.

Subjective Comments on Access

In Kamalaputhur village in Thiruvannamalai district of Tamil Nadu, the respondents narrated that a Dalit girl in second standard was prohibited from eating and chased out of her school (which was apparently located in the dominant caste locality) by the dominant caste community members when she tried to partake in the MMS. In 05 other villages (03 in Andhra Pradesh and 02 in Tamil Nadu), the respondents stated that some Dalit children were barred from participation in the MMS on account of either caste-based discrimination or due to the ‘untouchability’ syndrome. While these 06 villages constitute only 02 percent of the 306 villages surveyed, the living practice of
outright exclusion has profound implications for the Right to Food and in limiting the Dalits access to that Right.

More common than outright exclusion of the Dalit children was ‘inclusion with negative distinction’, i.e., caste-based discrimination in the MMS. While this too impinges on access, it will be discussed under the thematic category of treatment.

**Participatory Empowerment and Ownership**

**Percentage of the Dalit cooks**

As was evident with location of the MMS, similarly, there were sharp contradictions between the states in the percentages of the MMS cooks who were Dalits. In Rajasthan, only 08 percent of the villages surveyed had Dalit cooks, while 04 percent employed ST cooks, and the remaining 88 percent had dominant caste cooks. In Tamil Nadu, 31 percent of the villages surveyed had Dalit cooks, another 04 percent had both, Dalit and dominant caste cooks, and the rest 65 percent had dominant caste cooks (no ST cooks were found in any of the villages surveyed in Tamil Nadu). In a striking contrast, 49 percent of the villages surveyed in Andhra Pradesh had Dalit MMS cooks, 01 percent had ST cooks, 03 percent had mixed cooks (some from each community), and 47 percent had dominant caste cooks. The results for the three states combined together are as follows: 29 percent had Dalit cooks, 67 percent had dominant caste cooks, and 20 percent had ST cooks and mixed cooks (See Tables 1 D and 1 E and Figures 1 B, 1 C, 1 D, 1 E, 1 F and 1 G).
By definition the ‘organizers’ or ‘in-charges’ of the MMS denote the persons ultimately responsible for implementing the mid-day meal on a day-to-day basis. Most often, the organizers are either, schoolteachers, or school headmasters, but in some places the PDS dealers, sarpanchs or other community members are also given the responsibility for implementing the MMS.
The survey data for the Dalit organizers follows a pattern similar to that for the Dalit cooks, except highlighting the fact that there were even fewer
Dalits employed as organizers (a decision-making position of authority) than they were as cooks. In Rajasthan, for instance, not a single Dalit was in-charge for the MMS in the villages surveyed; 86 percent of the respondent villages had dominant caste organizers, while 14 percent had ST organizers. Tamil Nadu followed with 73 percent dominant caste organizers and 27 percent Dalit organizers. Again, Andhra Pradesh had the highest degree of Dalit participation and ownership in the MMS, with 45 percent Dalit organizers, 51 percent dominant caste organizers, and 02 percent each for ST and other caste organizers.

Figure 1 G, Caste of the MMS Organizers in Rajasthan

![Pie chart showing 86% dominant caste and 14% ST organizers]

Figure 1 H, Caste of the MMS Organizers in Tamil Nadu

![Pie chart showing 73% dominant caste and 27% SC organizers]
Figure 1 I, Caste of the MMS Organizers in Andhra Pradesh

Figure 1 J, Caste of the MMS Organizers - National Picture

Table 1 E, Caste of the MMS Organizers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Caste of MMS Organizers</th>
<th>Rajasthan</th>
<th>Andhra Pradesh</th>
<th>Tamil Nadu</th>
<th>03 State Average</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number of villages</td>
<td>Percentage of villages</td>
<td>Number of villages</td>
<td>Percentage of villages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SC organizers</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ST organizers</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dominant organizers</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizers from various castes</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total valid responses</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>173</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Subjective Comments on Participatory Empowerment - Denial of Right to Work

Survey questions framed in terms of subjective experiences are equally, if not, more important in understanding the nature of exclusion and caste discrimination, than questions framed in terms of quantifiable variables. The pitfalls of subjective questions can largely be overcome by a process of verification and specification through the particularizing of the follow-up questions; and the IIDS survey self-consciously attempted to elucidate the same.

In response to the general question, ‘is there caste-based discrimination in the MMS in your village?’ 52 percent of the respondents from Rajasthan, 24 percent from Andhra Pradesh, and 36 percent from Tamil Nadu (giving a three-state national average of 37 percent) reported that there was, indeed, a problem of caste-based discrimination in the MMS in their villages (See figure 1 L).
In response to the above question, specific questions revolving around the same issue were also posed such as, ‘if so, then how?’ The data furnished 79 valid responses from three states. Of these, 42 of the respondent villages, constituting the largest proportion, reported that opposition to the Dalit cooks was either, the primary problem, or one of the problems in their MMS.

Table 1 F, How does Caste-based Discrimination operate in the MMS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instances</th>
<th>Rajasthan</th>
<th>Andhra Pradesh</th>
<th>Tamil Nadu</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Separate seating (1)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Separate meals altogether (2)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When cook is SC, dominant caste children will not eat (3)</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inferior or insufficient food for SC children (4)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (5)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reasons 3 &amp; 4 both</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reasons 1 &amp; 3 &amp; 4 all</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reasons 1 &amp; 3 both</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reasons 1 &amp; 2 both</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reasons 2 &amp; 3 both</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total valid responses</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 G, How does Caste-based Discrimination operate in the MMS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Instances</th>
<th>Rajasthan</th>
<th>Andhra Pradesh</th>
<th>Tamil Nadu</th>
<th>National Total</th>
<th>National Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Separate seating (1)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>31.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Separate meals altogether (2)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When cook is SC, dominant caste children will not eat (3)</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>48.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inferior or insufficient food for SC children (4)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (5)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total valid responses</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>36*</td>
<td>39**</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* 34 single responses plus 1 double response (34+2).
** 26 single responses plus 5 double responses and one triple response (26+10+3).

The ‘opposition to Dalit cooks’ is actually a blanket term describing different patterns of specific caste-based discrimination and exclusion, observed during
the study. Such patterns are inclusive of the varied forms taking place at different points during the process of the MMS. First, when local administrators are putting the MMS into place, the dominant caste community members intervene to oppose the hiring of the Dalit cooks, favoring dominant caste cooks instead. Second, in case, a Dalit cook has been hired, the dominant caste parents start sending home cooked meals with their children, or require that their children come home for lunch; in any case, forbidding their children to eat food prepared by the Dalit cooks. Third, the dominant caste parents or community members pressurize the local administration to dismiss the Dalit cook, on any pretext and hire a dominant caste cook instead. Where this is ineffective, or sometimes without the intervening step, the dominant caste parents campaign to shut down the MMS in the village school altogether. Finally, some dominant caste parents react to the hiring and keeping of the Dalit cook by withdrawing their wards from the school and alternatively, admitting them in a school where the cook is not a Dalit.

Some instances may help illustrate the above patterns. Komara village in West Godavari district of Andhra Pradesh adequately exemplifies the first instance. Therein, the dominant caste women organized under the state government’s Development of Women and Children in Rural Areas (DWCRA) scheme, successfully mobilized community and administrative support to bar a Dalit women’s DWACRA group from obtaining employment as cooks in the village MMS.

Figure 1 M, Manifestations of Caste Discrimination in the MMS - National Picture

- Separate seating: 31.0%
- Separate meals altogether: 9.2%
- When cook is SC, dominant caste children will not eat: 48.3%
- Inferior or insufficient food for SC children: 9.2%
- Other: 2.3%
Bhunabhay village in Ajmer district of Rajasthan, also illustrates two of the trends identified above. In Bhunabhay, when the MMS began in July 2002, Sunita Bhil, a ST widow was hired to prepare the mid-day meal of ghughri. Dominant caste parents, considering Sunita polluted on account of her caste, ordered their children not to eat the mid-day meal at their school and effectively launched a proxy hunger strike through their children. Alongside, the dominant caste parents also met with and pressured the dominant caste headmaster of the school to dismiss Sunita Bhil from employment. Ultimately, the headmaster consented, expelling Sunita Bhil and hired a dominant caste woman instead.

Typifying the fourth trend, the MMS of a government school in Ranga Reddy district in Andhra Pradesh lasted exactly ten days, before the dominant caste community sensing that the Dalit cooks had been hired, made moves to close down the school itself.6

Veiled behind all of these trends of dominant caste behavior is the classic Hindu understanding of the notions of purity and pollution, according to which food prepared by a Dalit – i.e., an ‘erstwhile untouchable’ – is considered ‘polluted’ by virtue of its contact with the intrinsically polluted Dalit. On another level, the dominant caste opposition to the Dalit cooks also represents a power struggle over livelihood rights. In the manner of social boycotts and other measures of social ostracisms, concerted dominant caste opposition to the Dalit cooks functions to break the Dalit economic aspirations, i.e., Dalit entry into new livelihood domains such as Government employment at the village levels etc. The rural dominant caste establishment, which traditionally enjoys the economic dependence of the Dalit community, perceives the Dalit entry into new economic spheres as threatening, and therefore, responds with a backlash. This was most evident in Andhra Pradesh, where a higher proportion of the Dalits have secured employment as MMS cooks.

Treatment

Seating and Eating Arrangements

Referred to in Tables 1 F and 1 G, and Figure 1 M, the second most commonly reported manifestation of caste-based discrimination in the MMS is of segregated seating arrangements. The psycho-logical scarring and other detrimental effects of segregation have been well documented worldwide,
and as such, do not require being repeated here. As has been famously observed, ‘separate is never equal’, and this adage seems to be equally applicable to segregation in the MMS as well, which certainly contradicts the very nature of several Indian legislations, as well as, international laws to which India is a signatory. Needless to mention, segregation has obvious negative effects on the actualization of the Right to Food.

Several variations on the theme of segregation surfaced in the survey data. 31 percent of the villages specifying the form of caste-based discrimination in their MMS identified separate seating arrangements in their schools. In these instances, the Dalit children were required to sit apart from the dominant caste children; sometimes simply apart within the same space, other times outside of the school building, while the dominant caste children sat inside; and on a lower level than their dominant caste peers.

In 9.2 percent of the villages, the Dalit and the dominant caste children were served separate meals altogether. This separation was most evident in the case where two MMS cooks - one Dalit and one dominant caste were employed for the same school. The practice of separate meals usually implies segregated drinking water arrangements as well.

Interestingly, segregated seating was not always an institution practiced from the inception of the MMS. Paradigmatic of a trend most visible in the southern states, in Enathi village in Sivagangai district of Tamil Nadu, in 2001, the dominant caste community instituted segregated seating in the MMS in a primary school where the Dalit and dominant caste children previously had been sitting and eating together. In Enathi, following a dispute between a dominant caste woman and a Dalit woman over the latter’s right to draw water from a public well; the dominant caste woman’s community attacked the Dalit colony resulting in the hospitalization of the Dalit woman and her husband. When the Dalit community approached the police and administration for justice, Enathi’s dominant caste community organized rigorous social boycott of the Dalits by physically barricading the Dalit colony. It was in this context, that segregation was launched in the previously shared MMS.

Similar incidents reported in the survey are representative of a trend in which a caste conflict unrelated to the MMS flares up in a village, often as a result of the Dalit assertion of rights, and as a part of their efforts to re-establish hegemony; the dominant caste community initiates new forms of segregation (in the MMS, for instance), and asserts new practices of
untouchability. In one village in Tamil Nadu, the respondents to the survey stated that the dominant caste government schoolteacher ‘resolved’ the caste tensions in their village by introducing segregated seating arrangements. While it is common in popular discourse to describe the phenomena of caste-based discrimination as ‘remaining’, ‘still continuing’, and ‘lingering’; such jargon does not accurately characterize the ground level realities. Discourses aimed at eradicating caste-based discrimination must take into account the dynamism of caste phenomena, erroneously portrayed by the dismissive language of inevitable social progress.

**Preferential Treatment**

Respondents from another 08 villages (See Table 1 G) reported more subtle forms of discrimination being practiced. In these villages, the dominant caste teachers practiced caste favoritism in serving the MMS; treating the dominant caste children preferentially, and reserving the smaller or less desirable portions for the Dalit children.

**Issues in the Pre-MMS Dry Grain Distribution - The Case of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh**

Two of the states in need of a functioning MMS to help improve their dismal educational and nutritional records, Bihar and Uttar Pradesh were yet, to comply with the Supreme Court’s six-month deadline in implementing the MMS at the time of the survey, and continued instead, with a programme of dry rations that was initially intended to serve as a precursor to the MMS.

In Bihar, 99 percent of the researchers in the survey left the MMS section of the survey blank after answering the introductory question, ‘is there a MMS in your village?’. In Uttar Pradesh, on the other hand, a majority of researchers completed the data in the MMS section by applying the questions to the existing program of dry ration distribution. The following brief discussion was based on the data collected from Uttar Pradesh and informal observations from Bihar.

**Access**

**Existence of a Functioning MMS**

Setting aside the concept of free, shared, and cooked mid-day meal required by law to be served at all government schools, why is the system of free dry rations running in the States of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh?
At the outset, it is imperative to clarify that while some researchers treated
the dry ration distribution system as being equivalent to the MMS for the
purposes of the survey; the others did not, and therefore, the survey data
related to the question ‘is there a MMS in your village?’ cannot be used for
the purposes of analytical inferences. In Uttar Pradesh, however, nearly every
respondent village that chose to address the MMS questions pointed out two
basic congenital problems with the functioning of the dry ration distribution
system. First, while the system entails the distribution of 03 kilograms of
wheat or rice (the choice of grain varies by location) per child per month, the
full 03 kilograms were rarely provided; instead, the PDS distributor, the
sarpanch, the teacher, or the combination thereof, distributed about 02
kilograms or 2.5 kilograms, or in other words, amounts less than the stipulated
03 kilograms per child were distributed, and the rest were misappropriated.
Second, the distribution rarely took place on a monthly basis; rather, it took
months, and in some cases was distributed without regularity or assurances.
Some researchers in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh reported a complete absence of
the dry ration distribution system, or a system that had once functioned, but
had at the moment of the survey become defunct. Still, in a majority of the
villages, the system appeared to be prevalent, but with abundant corruption,
and no regularity or assurances.

Location of the MMS

57 percent of the valid responses from Uttar Pradesh elucidate that the actual
event of grain distribution took place in the school itself, as was stipulated
by law. In an alarming trend, however, another 37 percent of the respondent
villages reported that children had to either, go to the home, or the shop of
the PDS dealer to receive their 03 kilograms of grain (See Table 1 H).

Table 1 H, Location of Dry Ration Distribution in Uttar Pradesh

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Number of Villages</th>
<th>Percent of Villages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public building</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other*</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total valid responses</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Usually at the home or the shop of the PDS dealer.
In 52 out of 61 valid responses from Uttar Pradesh, dry rations were distributed, either from the schools, or the homes of the PDS dealers. But, while dealing with the main census of the study, the grain distribution to schoolchildren took place in the dominant caste villages. In 06 villages, distribution took place in a Dalit colony, and in 03 villages, in some other place (See Figure 1 N). Even when not out rightly prohibited from entering; the Dalit children were still in a situation of disadvantage and vulnerability in the dominant caste localities. The extreme bias of location evidenced in the data was thus, a considerable impediment to the Dalit children’s free and equal access to monthly grain, and the Right to Food, as well.

**Figure 1 N, Location of the Pre-MMS Dry Ration Distribution in 61 Villages in Uttar Pradesh**

Participatory Empowerment and Ownership

The issue of cooks does not arise in the dry ration distribution system. The proportion of the Dalit organizers, however, to the total number of organizers, provides a clear and measurable indicator of the Dalit participatory empowerment and ownership of the pre-MMS dry ration distribution system.

In 42 out of the 45 respondent villages in Uttar Pradesh, i.e., in 94 percent of cases; the organizers of dry ration distribution system were dominant caste people. Only 02 villages reported a Dalit organizer, and 01 village, a ST organizer (See Figure 1 O).

It was also noteworthy that in Uttar Pradesh, the distribution organizers were overwhelmingly male (32 out of the 35 valid responses or 91 percent). This contrasted significantly with the gender configuration of the MMS organizers in the states where cooked MMS was being provided (See Figure 1 P). When considering the degree of reported corruption and discrimination in the functioning of the pre-MMS system in Uttar Pradesh; 91 percent male
and 94 percent dominant caste composition among the grain distributors in-charges sounds interesting.

Figure 1 O, Caste of the Pre-MMS Organizers in Uttar Pradesh

![Graph showing caste distribution with 94% dominant caste, 4% SC, and 2% ST]

Treatment

Discriminatory treatment in the pre-MMS dry ration distribution system was widely reported from the Uttar Pradesh and Bihar surveys in which the respondents applied the MMS questions to the dry ration distribution system. One commonly reported phenomenon was the stinting of grains by the distributor (providing 02, or 2.5 kilograms instead of the stipulated 03 kilograms). This occurred mostly with the Dalit children, while the dominant caste children received the full-stipulated quantity. Elsewhere, the respondents explained that the government intermediaries consumed the entire quantities of grains allotted to the Dalit children, and that the Dalit children and their
parents were often, informed that the grain supply had either, not come, or was insufficient. In other places, it was also noted that if the Dalit children missed one or more days of school in any given month; the teacher refused to provide those children with their allotment of grain, whereas, the dominant caste children were excluded from such treatment.

In Sonadi village in Ghazipur district of Uttar Pradesh, the respondents reported that a dominant caste teacher arbitrarily withheld the monthly rice allotment for some Dalit children, while providing it to other SC children, and all of the dominant caste children. When the Dalit community approached the PDS distributor to lodge a complaint; the distributor responded by saying that the grain was “not for your children anyway”.

2.4 Concluding Summary of the MMS Data

The survey data clearly identifies the strengths and the shortcomings of the MMS as it is being conducted in India today, in terms of exclusion and caste-based discrimination as barriers to the Dalit attainment of the Right to Food. A review of this data highlights the primary issues the Dalits face in the MMS, and brings to the fore inter-state variations that indicate possible solutions.

‘Access to’ the MMS is first and foremost contingent on the implementation of the scheme by state governments. On this point, Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, where one-thirds of India’s Dalits reside; deny the Dalit and other poor children ‘access to’ their legislated entitlements from the very beginning, by simply refusing to implement the shared and cooked MMS. In the distribution of dry rations to the government school children that continues to substitute the MMS in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh; regularized corruption and caste-based discriminatory distribution were widely reported, and in some cases, outright exclusion of the Dalit children from the distribution processes was also reported. Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, thus, seem to be currently blocking, rather than facilitating, the Dalit children’s access to food through the MMS.

The governments of Rajasthan, Andhra Pradesh, and Tamil Nadu, on the other hand, have achieved the initial step towards access, by implementing the MMS. Out of the 306 villages surveyed in these 03 states, 301 villages or 98.4 percent have a functioning MMS in the government schools in their respective villages. A functioning MMS, however, does not always assure access to the Dalits. In a small number of the respondent villages in Andhra
Pradesh and Tamil Nadu, the Dalit children were completely barred from a functioning MMS by the dominant caste communities.

A second critical factor affecting the Dalits access to the MMS was the setting and location of the program. 93 percent of the respondent villages in Rajasthan, Andhra Pradesh, and Tamil Nadu hold the MMS in the school building itself, as is appropriate. Requiring immediate relocation, were instances from 02 villages in Tamil Nadu, wherein, the MMS was being held in temples; the space from, which the Dalits have traditionally been excluded.

In Uttar Pradesh, on the other hand (data was not available for Bihar), in only 57 percent of the respondent villages; the pre-MMS distribution of dry rations for school children was being conducted in the school building itself, while in another 37 percent of the villages it was being conducted in an ‘other place’, unacceptably, either, at the home or the shop of the PDS dealer.

If the physical space of the MMS is important, the locality in which that space is situated is equally, important. Rajasthan and Tamil Nadu had very low percentages of the villages in which the MMS was held in a Dalit locality (12 percent in Rajasthan and 19 percent in Tamil Nadu), whereas, the villages with more than double the preceding percentages, in both the states, held the MMS in the dominant caste localities. In a notable contrast, 46 percent of the respondent villages in Andhra Pradesh held the MMS in a Dalit locality, which ensures Dalit access, and also ultimately, erodes the dominant caste prejudices against entering the Dalit localities.

In Uttar Pradesh, in about 85 percent of the respondent villages, the distribution of dry rations took place in the dominant caste localities, while in less than 10 percent of the villages; the distribution was conducted in the Dalit localities. In Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, and Tamil Nadu, the vast majority of the Dalit children have to enter an area of heightened vulnerability, tension, and threat, in order to avail themselves of the mid-day meal or its dry ration equivalent. Access for the Dalit children is, thus, conditional and contingent to the fluctuating state of caste relations in the village or region. Incidents like those at Enathi and Kamalaputhur villages in Tamil Nadu demonstrate how the Dalit children’s access to the MMS, already tenuous, as it is held in the dominant caste localities, is then cutoff when the dominant castes feel the need to reassert their hegemonies.
In measuring the Dalits ‘participatory empowerment in and ownership of’ the MMS, the survey data unearthed interesting patterns, both in terms of national trends and inter-state variations. In hiring practices, Rajasthan emerged as being consistent with the least probability of employing the Dalits, with 08 percent of the respondent villages having a Dalit cook, and not a single respondent village having a Dalit MMS organizer. Tamil Nadu hired relatively more Dalits, while still keeping them firmly in the minority; with 31 percent of the respondent villages having Dalit cooks and 27 percent having Dalit organizers. Andhra Pradesh lead among the three states in indicators of Dalit empowerment and ownership of the MMS, with 49 and 45 percent of the respondent villages having the Dalits as cooks and organizers, respectively (See Tables 10 and 16).

One consistent argument against the hiring of the Dalit cooks was that the ‘society was not prepared to accept a shared meal cooked by a Dalit’; it will ‘create caste tensions’; ‘schools will be paralyzed’; and the ‘dominant caste children’s attendance will drop’, thus, defeating the very purpose of the MMS. This argument has particularly been made with reference to Rajasthan – ‘In a socially conservative environment like Rajasthan’s, where the dominant caste people were not ready to accept the Dalit cooks, hiring them now will cause more harm than good’. However, opposition to the Dalit cooks was the most frequently reported, not only, from Rajasthan, but from Andhra Pradesh, as well (and was a close second to segregated seating in Tamil Nadu). In other words, Andhra Pradesh’s success in hiring a significant proportion of the Dalit cooks was not due to lack of opposition, but rather seems to be a matter of political will (generated by sustained pressures from people’s movements). Also, the fact that Andhra Pradesh’s relatively progressive hiring practices have not been accompanied by a corresponding crisis of dropping school attendance or the paralysis of the school system suggests that the above argument against the hiring of Dalit cooks, speculative in nature anyway, is in fact, both, spurious and flawed.

Measurable indicators point to an extremely low level of Dalit ‘participatory empowerment and ownership of’ the pre-MMS dry ration distribution system in Uttar Pradesh. In 94 percent of the respondent villages, the distribution organizers were dominant castes; with SC and ST organizers to be found (in a combined way) only in 06 percent of the respondent villages.

In terms of the treatment of the Dalits in the MMS, 27 respondent villages in Rajasthan, Andhra Pradesh, and Tamil Nadu reported segregated seating in
the MMS, and 08 villages reported segregated meals altogether. In another 08 villages, the respondents reported that the Dalit children were served food ‘inferior to’ or in ‘lesser amounts than’ their dominant caste classmates.

In terms of a three-state national average, 37 percent of the respondent villages reported that caste discrimination does; in fact, afflict the MMS in the respective villages of the states. The opposition to the Dalit cooks being the single most problematic phenomenon (48.3 percent); followed by segregated seating (31 percent); segregated meals (9.2 percent); and unfavorable treatment in food allotment (9.2 percent).

Taking a closer look at the 37 percent national average, considerable inter-state variations come to the fore. In Rajasthan, 52 percent; in Tamil Nadu, 36 percent; and in Andhra Pradesh, 24 percent of the respondent villages reported caste-based discrimination in the MMS. Perceptively, this configuration was nearly an exact inverse of the inter-state variation for the percentage of villages with the Dalit cooks, percentage of villages with the Dalit organizers, and percentage of villages in which the MMS was held in a Dalit locality. That is to say, Andhra Pradesh, which had the highest percentage of the Dalit cooks, Dalit organizers, and MMS organized in the Dalit localities, simultaneously, had the lowest percentage of reported caste-based discrimination in the MMS. Rajasthan, which had the lowest percentage of the Dalit cooks, Dalit organizers, and MMS held in the Dalit colonies, had the highest rate of reported caste-based discrimination; and Tamil Nadu stood midway between Rajasthan and Andhra Pradesh in each of these variables (See Figures 1 Q, 1 R, 1 S and 1 T).
Therefore, the question that arises even from a cursory look at the data is whether the matching patterns emerging from the data indicate causality.

Both, quantitative and qualitative evidence from the data suggests that the above variables share at least an influential, if not a direct causal relationship with the degree of reported discrimination in each state under consideration.
By isolating each variable, for instance, the rates of reported discrimination were consistently lower when the Dalit organizers were in charge of the MMS; when the Dalit cooks were cooking the mid-day meal; and when the MMS was being held in a Dalit colony - than when the dominant caste organizers were in charge of the MMS; when the dominant caste cooks were cooking the mid-day meal; and when the MMS was being held in the dominant caste localities. Subjective comments from researchers and respondents also affirm that these trends were interlinked.

A look at Andhra Pradesh data, further, supports this understanding. An obvious question, which then arises is what sets Andhra Pradesh apart? Does the lower incidence of reported caste-based discrimination in the MMS in Andhra Pradesh simply reflective of a more caste-free egalitarian society than the neighboring Tamil Nadu, or the distant Rajasthan? A quick glance at any of the literature available on the subject, for instance, the annual reports of the National Commission for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (NCSCST), or the annual reports of human rights organizations such as Sakshi-Human Rights Watch, Andhra Pradesh will disabuse the reader of any such notion. In fact, the rates of reported crimes committed against the Dalits are higher in Andhra Pradesh than in Tamil Nadu, Bihar, Karnataka, or Orissa, while simultaneously, being lower than in Rajasthan or Uttar Pradesh. Andhra Pradesh’s relatively lower levels of reported discrimination in the MMS in the survey data, then, cannot be linked to lower levels of casteism in the society generally.

Instead, as the patterns in data suggest, the high percentages of the Dalit cooks and organizers, and the higher percentage of villages in which the MMS is held in the Dalit localities, appear to be responsible for Andhra’s relatively low incidence of reported caste-based discrimination in the MMS. But how is it that Andhra Pradesh designates such higher levels of participatory empowerment to the Dalits? One primary reason is that the Andhra Pradesh government conducts the MMS through local women’s organizations known as DWACRA groups. As an alternative to implementing the scheme only through the usual channels of entrenched government machinery, known for corruption, casteism, and unaccountability; having a joint set-up between the government and local social organizations, appears to have an invigorating effect on all actors involved. Given the opportunity to take up leadership roles and local level government employment, mothers of government school going children take an increased interest in and engagement with the school and the MMS, and begin to demand access and extract accountability from the government machinery.
Sustained mass action by mobilized people’s movement in Andhra Pradesh should be credited with creating the political atmosphere in which the state government has been forced to engage and cooperate with the local NGOs in implementing its schemes. While DWACRA groups are government sponsored, they are clearly influenced by the models provided by social movements. Just as people’s participation has a proven record of decreasing corruption by government officials, likewise, it seems that people’s participation, particularly the Dalit people’s participation, is beginning to bring down levels of exclusion and caste-based discrimination in government schemes.

However, it would be wrong to suggest that the DWACRA group model is alone sufficient to eradicate the problems of the MMS, or that Andhra Pradesh has ‘arrived’ in terms of enabling the Dalits the Right to Food through the MMS. There is still a 24 percent rate of reported caste-based discrimination in the MMS in Andhra Pradesh, meaning that the Dalit children in one out of four schools face segregated seating; opposition to their community’s cooks; segregated meals altogether; and other forms of discriminatory treatment. The survey data furnishes several instances of the dominant caste women’s DWACRA groups practicing exclusion or discrimination in the MMS, for instance, by rallying the dominant caste community to bar the Dalit women’s DWACRA groups from employment as the MMS cooks. Three cases of brazen exclusion of the Dalit children from the MMS amply demonstrate the problem, and remain a far cry before the Andhra Pradesh government can make any meaningful claims about the success of its policies.

A study of Andhra Pradesh’s MMS provides us with a model, which might not be ideal, but surely is representative of work in progress, with mixed successes, from which some ideas could be adopted. Certain policies and approaches, which characterize the successful working of the MMS in Andhra Pradesh, could possibly be replicated in the other states. First, the government should increase the proportion of schools and the MMS centers in the Dalit colonies. Second, the government should promote the Dalit participatory empowerment and ownership of the MMS through hiring and promoting larger proportions of the Dalit cooks and organizers. This can be catalyzed, partly, by implementing the MMS through or with the collaboration of people’s movements and local organizations such as Dalit women’s self-help groups etc.
The survey data, from Uttar Pradesh’s dry ration distribution system to Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, and Andhra Pradesh’s cooked MMS, sketches two vivid pictures of possible MMS at different ends of a broad spectrum. On one end of the continuum is a government welfare scheme in which the entrenched, dominant caste intermediaries of the government machinery are entrusted with giving monthly handouts to poor children. This scheme, interestingly, is conducted strictly on the terms of the dominant caste intermediaries, in their localities; with preferential treatment for their children; routine embezzlement; corruption; unaccountability; and anything from apathy to contemptuous hostility towards the children and parents of the Dalit community. On the other end of the continuum are the government programs, jointly operated and monitored by the government and locally empowered community groups with the Dalit leadership, and/or representation, in which the Dalit children and the dominant caste children share daily hot, cooked, and nutritious meals in a Dalit locality, or in the dominant caste locality, and as often, with a Dalit cook as with a non-Dalit cook. In practical terms, the only exclusion emerging from the picture is the elective self-exclusion of the most conservative elements in the dominant caste society, who initially, withdrew their children from the program, but eventually, when their pressure tactics on a government committed to actualizing its Constitution and laws failed; re-enrolled their children and slowly adjusted to a truly democratic and egalitarian society. The Dalit ‘access to’ and ‘fair treatment in’ the MMS in this picture was assured through the Dalit decision-making empowerment and real ownership stakes in the program, which as part of the fabric of a vigilant civil society also kept the government accountable.

3. The Public Distribution System

3.1 The Context

The Indian Government’s targeted Public Distribution System (PDS) is reputed to be the largest system of controlled food distribution in the world. As a part of the system, the Government distributes essential food commodities; notably rice, wheat, sugar, and oil, through the Food Corporation of India (FCI) to the needy areas, where people of Below Poverty Line (BPL) status can purchase the goods at subsidized and below-market prices fixed by the Government. At the local level, the stocks are provided through the Government-recognized ‘Fair Price Shops’, or PDS shops, run by the local government-recognized PDS dealers.
Unlike the MMS, the PDS is functioning throughout India. In the IIDS study, all 531 villages surveyed in Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Andhra Pradesh, and Tamil Nadu, addressed the issues pertaining to PDS.

3.2 Approach

Similar to the MMS section, the PDS section of this working paper too, identifies exclusion and caste-based discrimination in terms of ‘access’, ‘participatory empowerment and ownership’, and ‘treatment’. The following measurable indicators were used to evaluate ‘access’. First, the existence and number of the PDS shops in respondent villages - are there PDS shops in your village, and if so, how many? Second, the location of the PDS shops - are the PDS shops located in the dominant caste localities, the Dalit colonies, or in other places?

The measurable indicator for the ‘participatory empowerment and ownership’ was the proportion of the Dalit PDS dealers to the total PDS dealers - do the Dalits always have to receive goods from the dominant caste PDS shops, or are there Dalit PDS dealers in the community, as well?

Measurable indicators for ‘treatment in’ the PDS include subjective responses to questions regarding, first, discrimination in quantity - do the Dalits receive less than the legislated amount of goods for the price demanded? Second, discrimination in price - do the PDS dealers charge the Dalits more than the dominant caste members for the same products? Three, caste-based unfavorable treatment by the PDS dealers - do the dominant caste PDS dealers favor their own community members while distributing rations? And four, the practice of untouchability by the PDS dealers - do the PDS dealers employ untouchability practices in the physical act of distribution or sale?

3.3 Findings

Access

Existence and Number of PDS shops

To the credit of the system, the PDS shops are largely functioning. As a national average, 87 percent of the respondent villages in the IIDS study reported having at least one functioning PDS shop in their village: 73 percent of the respondents had exactly 01 PDS shop in their village, while 14 percent had more than one PDS shop per village. However, 13 percent of the respondent
villages had no PDS shop in their village and traveled outside to avail themselves of their legislated entitlements of subsidized goods.

Most of the villages without PDS shops were located either, in Uttar Pradesh, or Bihar. Taking a look at the inter-state variations, Uttar Pradesh emerged as being the most recalcitrant in assuring PDS accessibility, with 39 percent of the respondent villages lacking PDS shops and only 7 percent having more than one PDS shop. Bihar followed with 16 percent of villages lacking a PDS shop and only 10 percent having more than one PDS shop. Rajasthan and Tamil Nadu score about equally; 100 percent of Rajasthan’s admittedly small sample size of the respondent villages reported having exactly 01 PDS shop per village, while in Tamil Nadu 07 percent of villages reported not having PDS shops and another 09 percent reporting lack of PDS shops, and having more than one PDS shop, respectively. Access appears most assured in Andhra Pradesh, wherein, 44 percent of the respondent villages had more than one shop, 53 percent having exactly one shop and only 03 percent having reported no PDS shop (See Figure 2 A).

Figure 2 A, How many PDS Shops are there in your Village?--National Picture

As for the MMS section, the survey did not directly ask questions regarding the distance between the Dalit dwellings and the nearest PDS shops, but nevertheless, 29 respondent villages did make a point to remark on distance being a factor impinging access to the PDS shops. Of these, 26 or 05 percent of the villages surveyed, commented that they had to travel far or more than 02 kilometers to reach the nearest PDS shop.

Location of the PDS Shops
Second factor conditioning the Dalit access to the benefits of the PDS was the location in which the PDS shops were physically situated. In Rajasthan,
the PDS shops were located in the dominant caste localities in 91 percent of the respondent villages, while not a single shop in the villages surveyed was located in a Dalit colony, and 09 percent of the shops were located elsewhere. In Uttar Pradesh, shops were located in the dominant caste localities in 82 percent of the villages, 16 percent in the Dalit colonies, and 02 percent elsewhere. In Bihar, the dominant caste colonies had shops in 76 percent of villages and the other 24 percent were located in the Dalit colonies. In Tamil Nadu, the dominant caste localities had the PDS shops in 53 percent of villages, 16 percent in the Dalit colonies (same as Uttar Pradesh), and 31 percent elsewhere. Andhra Pradesh had the highest proportion of the PDS shops in the Dalit colonies (about 30 percent) and the lowest proportion in the dominant caste colonies (about 48 percent,) and 22 percent elsewhere. As a national average, then, 17 percent of villages had the PDS shops in the Dalit colonies, while the rest 70 percent (more than four times the former) had the PDS shops located in the dominant caste localities, and 13 percent had the PDS shops located elsewhere (See Figure 2 B).

![Figure 2 B, Location of the PDS Shops - National Picture](image)

Participatory Empowerment and Ownership

Proportion of the Dalit PDS dealers to the total PDS dealers

Even more striking in the survey data was the preponderance of the dominant caste PDS dealers and the subsequent, paucity of the Dalit dealers. Herein again, Andhra Pradesh stood out as the only state in which the Dalits had attained a significant degree of participatory empowerment, with 32 percent ownership of the PDS shops, the rest 07 and 61 percent being owned by the STs and the dominant castes respectively. In an interesting departure from the earlier patterns, in the case of the PDS shop ownership it was Tamil Nadu that ranked the highest in dominant caste hegemony (91 percent) and the
lowest level of Dalit empowerment (09 percent), followed by Uttar Pradesh (90 and 10 percent respectively), Rajasthan (85 and 15 percent respectively), and Bihar (78 and 22 percent respectively). The national average stood at about 81 percent dominant caste ownership of the PDS shops and 19 percent combined SC and ST ownership (See Figure 2 C).

**Figure 2 C, Caste of the PDS Dealers - National Picture**

![Figure 2 C, Caste of the PDS Dealers - National Picture](image)

**Treatment**

**Discrimination in Quantity**

As a national average, 40 percent of the respondent villages reported that the Dalits received, for the same price, lesser quantities than the dominant castes from the PDS shopkeepers. In ascending order of reported discrimination, 16 percent of the respondent villages in Rajasthan, 29 percent in Tamil Nadu, 30 percent in Andhra Pradesh, 56 percent in Uttar Pradesh, and 70 percent in Bihar reported discrimination in the quantities distributed.

**Discrimination in Price**

Less common, but still prevalent was the problem of charging the Dalit customers extra for the same quantity of product that the dominant castes purchased at a lower cost by some PDS dealers. The practice was not reported in Rajasthan, perhaps because of the small sample size there. 09 percent of the respondent villages in Andhra Pradesh, 16 percent in Tamil Nadu, 51 percent in Uttar Pradesh, and 66 percent in Bihar reported discriminatory pricing. Cumulatively, the national average, thus, worked out to be about 28 percent.
Caste-based Favoritism by the Dealer

At a national average of 48 percent, this was the most commonly reported form of caste-based discrimination in the PDS. The respondents described this phenomenon taking numerous forms. In some places, the PDS dealers serviced their own caste communities and all dominant castes throughout the week, while only serving the Dalit community on arbitrarily designated, ‘Dalit days’, falling once or twice in a week. Preferential order in service translates into the fact that while the Dalits were kept waiting and served last, the PDS dealer’s caste-fellows or other dominant caste members were served immediately. Describing the way in which caste-based favoritism works in the PDS in their village, the respondents of Tarka village of Ghazipur district, Uttar Pradesh, related an incident in which the members of the Dalit community were in severe need of sugar and other goods from the PDS, but the dominant caste PDS dealer flatly refused, saying that his stock had run out. The same day, some members of the PDS dealer’s own caste had a wedding for which they received ‘quintal after quintal’ of sugar and other supposedly absent goods from the PDS shop.

In Andhra Pradesh, 17 percent of the respondent villages reported the problem of the PDS dealer practicing caste-based favoritism in the distribution of goods. In Tamil Nadu 41 percent, in Rajasthan 42 percent, in Uttar Pradesh 54 percent, and in Bihar, a remarkably higher number of villages had to regularly contend with such forms of casteist treatment or caste-based discrimination from their PDS dealers (See Figures 2 D, 2 E, 2 F, 2 G, 2 H and 2 I).

Figure 2 D, Discrimination in the PDS - National Picture
Figure 2 E, Discrimination in the PDS in Rajasthan

Figure 2 F, Discrimination in the PDS in Uttar Pradesh

Figure 2 G, Discrimination in the PDS in Bihar

Figure 2 H, Discrimination in the PDS in Andhra Pradesh
Untouchability practices by the PDS Dealer

Outlawed in 1950 with the ratification of the Indian Constitution, the dominant caste practice of ‘untouchability’ toward the Dalits continues even in the 21st century, not only, as a social neurosis, but also as an unofficial policy of various Government actors - with a national average of 26 percent of the PDS dealers, according to the survey respondents, practicing untouchability in the distribution of Government goods to the Dalits. One classic untouchability practice is the dominant caste dropping of goods (water, food, and money etc.) from above into the cupped hands of the Dalits below, so as to avoid the possibility of ‘polluting’ contact between the ‘upper’ and the ‘lower’ castes. Though, this remains in evidence, but other forms of untouchability also emerged from the survey data. In villages in Patna district of Bihar, for instance, the dominant caste PDS dealers hang a separating purdah (curtain) in the shop window before having any dealings with the members of the Musaher (a Dalit) community.

In the study, none of the small sample of the respondent villages in Rajasthan reported ‘untouchability’ practices in their local PDS shops, though such practices have been documented elsewhere in the state. In Andhra Pradesh 11 percent, in Tamil Nadu 25 percent, in Uttar Pradesh 35 percent, and in Bihar 59 percent of the respondent villages reported ‘untouchability’ practices (See Figure 2 J). Within the states, as well, considerable variations between various regions and districts were evident and may help in the identification of areas where more attention is needed to eradicate the practice. For a complete breakdown of the geography of ‘untouchability’ in the survey data, see Table 2 A.
3.4 Concluding Summary of the PDS Data

The PDS is arguably the strongest available tool with which the poor and the marginalized populations in India can, at present, actualize their Right to Food. Whether it is operated commendably or outrageously can indeed, make the difference between sustenance and preventable starvation for the SC and the ST communities in certain areas. While the intent of the PDS is to bring the food from where it is most plentiful to where it is most needed, and to deliver it into the hands of those who need it most, there are problems with the system’s practical implementation, such that the food often, ends up in hands other than those of the most needy. Avoidable starvation, therefore, does occur in India today. The study examines the Dalits experience of the PDS to identify, locate and measure the points of caste-based discrimination and exclusion that cripple the PDS, and keep it from fulfilling its intended purpose.

The Dalit access to the PDS is, first, contingent on the existence of a nearby and functioning PDS shops. In this regard, the survey data, for India as a whole, is mostly positive - with a national average of 87 percent of the respondent villages having at least one functioning PDS shop. In Uttar Pradesh, however, 39 percent of the respondent villages had no PDS shop - a fact, which needs to be addressed seriously and expeditely. Bihar also, with 16 percent of the respondent villages without the PDS shops, needs to work on the matter. Andhra Pradesh can, perhaps, offer advice, as 44 percent of its respondent villages had more than one PDS shop per village, potentially increasing access for all.
Access is then conditioned by the location in which the PDS shop is situated. Nationally, 17 percent of the respondent villages had the PDS shops located in the Dalit localities, while over four times that percentage were located in the dominant caste localities, and the rest were located elsewhere. In individual states, the picture was even more stark: Rajasthan had zero percent respondent villages with the PDS shops in the Dalit colonies and 91 percent with the PDS shops in dominant caste localities. Among Andhra Pradesh’s respondent villages, by contrast, 30 percent had the PDS shops in a Dalit locality, 48 percent in the dominant caste localities, and 22 percent located elsewhere.

As a national average, 81 percent of the PDS shops in the respondent villages were owned and run by the dominant caste dealers. In Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, and Tamil Nadu the percentage of the dominant caste dealers was even higher, at 85, 90, and 91 percentage points respectively. The Dalit participatory empowerment, then, as expressed through the ownership of the PDS shops, was quite dismal in most of the states, with the exception of Andhra Pradesh, wherein, the Dalits managed 32 percent ownership of the PDS shops in the respondent villages.

In terms of the treatment to the Dalits in the PDS; caste-based discrimination in various manifestations was commonly reported, if not being overwhelmingly present throughout the states. Caste-based favoritism towards their own communities by the dominant caste PDS dealers (and inversely proportional dis-favoritism toward the Dalits) was most frequently reported problem nationally, and in percentage terms, stood at about 48 percent. Discrimination against the Dalits in the quantity of goods given at the PDS shop was second most commonly reported problem at about 40 percent, followed by discrimination in price at about 28 percent. A national average of about 26 percent of the respondent villages per state reported that dominant caste PDS dealers practiced ‘untouchability’ in the physical act of distribution of the PDS goods.

As long as the intended beneficiaries of the PDS are kept out of the decision-making and implementation process, the corruption and discrimination for which the PDS has become notorious will continue to flourish. 70 percent of the PDS shops were located in the dominant caste localities, where the Dalits are necessarily on the defensive, 81 percent of the PDS shopkeepers belonged
to the dominant castes, and more than one in four PDS shopkeepers continued to practice ‘untouchability’ in one form or another when dealing with the Dalit customers. When asked in the survey ‘do you feel that the SC/STs should have separate PDS shops from those owned by the dominant castes?’ a national average of about 75 percent of the respondent villages responded in the affirmative (in Bihar interestingly, 100 percent respondents replied in the affirmative). For further details regarding the responses see Figure 2 K.

Similar to the inferences from the MMS data, in PDS too, Andhra Pradesh reported low levels of caste-based discrimination in comparison to most of the states under consideration. The increased degree of participation by the Dalits in the implementation of the PDS - through the PDS ownership - seems to have had a catalytic effect in decreasing the levels of discrimination and increasing the levels of accountability in the Government machinery. A higher percentage of the PDS shops located in the Dalit colonies also seems to have increased the Dalit access to the PDS and decreased the scope for practicing ‘untouchability’. Empowerment through participation and ownership, as well as, empowerment through sensitive relocation into the Dalit localities, emerge from the data as potentialities currently being realized in Andhra Pradesh, and this understanding seems to be crucial for similar realizations in the other states.

4. Concluding Recommendations

4.1 Mid-day Meal Scheme

- Keeping in mind the DWACRA model as an imperfect, but suggestive paradigm, state governments should involve the NGOs, the CBOs,
and the people’s movements that have Dalit leadership - particularly, Dalit women’s leadership and representation and grassroots support, in implementing, running and monitoring the MMS;

- The MMS cooking positions should be reserved for the Dalits, and reservation should be effectively and particularly, enforced in areas or regions, wherein, there are resistances to the Dalits by the dominant caste communities;

- Dalit teachers, PDS dealers, and Panchayat (local self government) members should be promoted to organize and manage the MMS.

- The perpetrators of exclusion and open discrimination against the Dalit children should be arrested and various legal provisions should be strictly enforced against them; and

- In the case of opening new MMS centres or where an old space is no longer feasible, the MMS centres should be located in the Dalit colonies.

4.2 Public Distribution System

- The Dalits should be offered incentives and subsidies (Government loans, grants, land grants, and other support in building the physical shops etc.) to start their own PDS shops;

- The PDS shops should be located in the Dalit colonies;

- The PDS shops should be started in villages with no PDS shop, and also in the case where the Dalits have to travel further than 01 kilometre, a PDS shop should be started in a Dalit colony; and

- In the case a PDS shop owner is found to be practicing caste-based discrimination or perpetuating ‘untouchability’; strict legal proceedings in accordance with the law should be enforced against him.
### Table 2 A, Untouchability in the PDS - Does the Owner of the PDS shop in your Village Practice Untouchability in Supplying Goods?

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<td>Virudhinagar</td>
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<td>Total Tamil Nadu</td>
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Endnotes

1. Departures from this methodology, however, did occur and provide an enlightening counter-study. An informal study of about forty surveys (mostly from Andhra Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh) in which the researchers interviewed, not just the Dalit community, but rather only the dominant caste sarpanchs, village administrative officers, other local officials, schoolteachers, and the dominant caste community as a whole, points to a dramatic divergence in the perception between the communities. Almost without exception, the surveys based on interviews with officials and dominant caste people suggest smooth operation of Government schemes and the complete absence of caste-based discrimination; whereas, surveys taken from neighboring or adjoining villages, but drawn from the Dalit interviews, cite specific instances of caste-based discrimination and serious grievances with the Government machineries. Recently, elected Dalit women sarpanches are an exception to this trend; in this dataset, surveys based on interviews with elected Dalit women officials provide candid acknowledgments of persisting caste-based discrimination.

2. See, for instance, Friere, Paolo, Pedagogy of the Oppressed, and Baldwin, James, Notes of a Native Son.

3. Of the 531 villages surveyed, only 13, or 2.4 percent of the total, claimed that caste-based discrimination was a problem in every one of the aspects considered. Among those 13, each one went on to clarify the specific ‘character of’ and ‘reasons behind’ the particular manifestations of caste-based discrimination, rather than making unsubstantiated claims. Of the other 518 villages surveyed, 476 (or 89.6 percent of the total) identified caste-based discrimination as being evident in certain sectors and absent in others, while 42 (or 7.9 percent of the total) claimed no caste-based discrimination in any sector.

4. National Council for Educational Research and Training, Sixth All-India Educational Survey, New Delhi, 1997. Table 1.1. The Seventh AIES data remained unpublished at the time of the research.

5. When her parents objected to the school authorities, the dominant caste community lodged bogus cases with the police against the parents and had them arrested.

6. This example does not emanate from the IIDS survey, but from a media report in the Telugu daily, Vaartha, Ranga Reddy District Pullout, 04 January 2003.


9. Rajasthan is left out of this national average, as all but four respondents in Rajasthan skipped this question.
Select Bibliography


Annexure I

1. Survey Questionnaire Plus Code Key

STATE

1. Rajasthan.
2. Uttar Pradesh.
4. Andhra Pradesh.

DISTRICT

Varies from state to state.

BLOCK

Varies from state to state.

PANCHAYAT

Varies from state to state.

VILLAGE

Varies from state to state.

INVESTIGATOR

Name of investigator/conductor of survey.

ORGANIZATION

Name of organization to which investigator is responsible.
2. MID-DAY MEAL SCHEME

MMS (1): Is there a Mid-day Meal Scheme in your village?

1. Yes.
2. No.
3. There was, but it was closed.

MMS_WHEN (2): If yes, then in what year did the Mid-day Meal Scheme begin?

5. 2003.

MMS_CLOSED (3): If there was, but it was closed, then what is the reason?

1. Dominant castes opposed the scheme because it would benefit the SC/ST children.
2. Dominant castes opposed the scheme because the Dalit and the dominant caste children would have to sit together for the mid-day meal.
3. No initiative or no leadership for the scheme.
4. Problem with funding.
5. Problem with food supply.
6. Other (please explain).

MMS_DAYS (4): Is the Mid-day Meal actually served every day? If not, then how many days per month is the Mid-day Meal actually provided?

1. All days.
2. All days except Saturdays and Sundays.
3. All days except public holidays.
4. Other (please explain).

MMS_TYPE (5): Are the Mid-day Meals hot, cooked meals, or uncooked meals?

1. Cooked meals.
2. Uncooked meals.
3. Other/both (please explain).
COOK_CASTE (6 A): What is the caste and gender of the cook for the Mid-day Meal Scheme?
1. SC.
2. ST.
4. One SC and one Non SC/ST.
5. One SC, one ST, and one Non SC/ST.
6. One SC and one ST.
7. One ST and one Non SC/ST.

COOK_SEX (6 B):
1. Male.
2. Female.
3. One male, and one female.

ORGANIZER_CASTE (7 A): What is the caste and gender of the organizer/in-charge for the Mid-day Meal Scheme?
1. SC.
2. ST.
4. One SC and one Non SC/ST.
5. One SC, one ST, and one Non SC/ST.
6. One SC and one ST.
7. One ST and one Non SC/ST.

ORGANIZER_SEX (7 B):
1. Male.
2. Female.
3. One male, and one female.

ORGANIZER_STATUS (8): What is the status of the organizer/in-charge in the village?
1. Teacher.
2. Sarpanch.
3. Panchayat member.
4. Other (please identify).
5. Teacher and Sarpanch both.
**MMS_WHERE (9)**: Where is the Mid-day Meal held?

1. School.
2. Temple.
3. Public building (please identify).
4. Other (please identify).

**MMS_PLACE (10)**: Where is this space located?

1. SC colony.
2. Dominant caste village.
3. Other (please identify).
4. One in the SC colony, one in the dominant caste village.

**EATERS_CASTE_SC (11 A)**: Please list the caste of the children who eat in the Mid-day Meal Scheme.

Numeric, with “50” indicating “some” when only “some” are indicated.

**EATERS_CASTE_ST (11 B)**:

Numeric, with “50” indicating “some” when only “some” are indicated.

**EATERS_CASTE_BC (11 C)**:

Numeric, with “50” indicating “some” when only “some” are indicated.

**EATERS_CASTE_OC (11 D)**:

Numeric, with “50” indicating “some” when only “some” are indicated.

**LEFT_OUT_WHY (12 A)**: Are there any children left out of the Mid-day Meal Scheme? If so, why?

1. Migration.
2. Child labour (children who would be eating in the MMS, but are labouring instead).
6. ‘Economic illiteracy’ (lack of information/awareness about the MMS).
7. Water scarcity in school and mid-day meal served in sun (poor conditions).
8. School is far from the SC children’s homes (distance).

9. Rich and the dominant caste children ‘left out’ in the sense that they elect to attend non-governmental schools to avoid the shared mid-day meal.

LEFT_OUT_NUMBER (12 B): How many children are left out?

Numeric, with “1001” indicating “some” when only “some” are indicated.

MMS_DISCRIMINATION (13): Is there caste-based discrimination in the Mid-day Meal Scheme?

1. Yes.

2. No.

MMS_DIC_HOW (14): If yes, then how?


2. Separate meals altogether for the SC and the Non SC/ST children.

3. When the cook is a SC, the Non SC/ST students refuse to eat.

4. Inferior or insufficient food given to the SC students.

5. Other (please explain).

6. Separate meals and refusal to eat from the SC cook (2 and 3 both).

7. Refusal to eat from the SC cook and inferior/insufficient food (3 and 4 both).

8. Separate seating, refusal to eat from the SC cook, and inferior food (1, 3, and 4 all).

9. Separate seating and refusal to eat from the SC cook (1 and 3 both).

10. Separate seating and separate meals (1 and 2 both).

MMS_DISC_PROBLEM (15): Have you ever had a problem with the Mid-day Meal Scheme because of caste-based discrimination?

1. Yes.

2. No.

MMS_DISC_WHEN (16 A): If yes, then when?

Year (2001, 2003, etc).
MMS_DISC_WHAT (16 B): What was the nature of the problem?
2. Practice of untouchability (chuachut).
3. Poverty and caste combined.
4. Teacher does not give the same to some or all the SC children.
5. Non SC/ST children’s parents withdraw their children or forbid their children to eat because the MMS cook is a SC.

MMS_DISC_SOLVED (16 C): How was it (the problem) solved?
1. Panchayat meeting.
2. Civil confrontation.
3. Through administration (RDO, police, etc).
4. ‘Compromise’.
5. Switched schools.

MMS_DISC_JUSTICE (16 D): Were the Dalits able to obtain justice?
1. Yes.
2. No.

3. PDS – PUBLIC DISTRIBUTION SYSTEM

PDS_NUMBER (1): How many PDS shops are there in your village?
Numeric.

DEALER_CASTE (2): What are the castes of the PDS dealers?
1. SC.
2. ST.
4. One SC, and one Non SC/ST.
5. One ST, and one Non SC/ST.
6. One SC, one ST, and one Non SC/ST (one of each).
7. One SC and one ST.
HELP NUMBER (3 A): How many helpers are there in the PDS shops, and what are their castes?

Numeric.

HELP CASTE (3 B):
1. SC.
2. ST.
4. One SC, and one Non SC/ST.
5. One ST, and one Non SC/ST.
6. One SC, one ST, and one Non SC/ST (one of each).
7. One SC and one ST.

PDS SEPARATE (4): Are there separate PDS shops for the SCs and the Non SC/STs?
1. Yes.
2. No.

PDS WHERE (5 A): Where are the PDS fair price shops located?
1. SC colony.
2. Dominant caste village.
3. Elsewhere (please identify).
4. One in SC colony, and one in dominant caste village (one in each).

PDS DISTANCE (5 B): (NOTE – this question is not on the survey, but frequently enough commented by investigators to warrant a data entry)

How far is the PDS fair price shop from the Dalit colony?
1. ‘Far’ or outside our village entirely (must go to another village for PDS shop).
2. ‘Nearby’ or less than one kilometer away.
3. 01-02 kilometers away.
4. More than 02 kilometers away.

FULL RATION (6): Do the SC/STs receive the full legal ration from the PDS shops?
1. Yes.
2. No.
DISC_QUANTITY (7): Is there caste-based discrimination in the quantity of food given at the PDS shops?

1. Yes.
2. No.

DISC_PRICE (8): Is there caste-based discrimination in the price given at the PDS shops?

1. Yes.
2. No.

DEALER_FAVOUR (9): If the owner of the PDS shop is a Non SC/ST, does he favor his own caste-people in distribution?

1. Yes.
2. No.

DEALER_UNTOUCHABILITY (10): If the owner of the PDS shop is a Non SC/ST, does he practice untouchability in supplying goods?

1. Yes.
2. No.

PDS_WANT_SEPARATE (11): Do you feel that the SC/STs should have separate PDS shops from those owned by the dominant castes?

1. Yes.
2. No.

PDS_HELP (12): What sort of help would you prefer in managing a PDS shop?

1. Government credit.
2. Government loan.
3. Shop provided free.
4. Other (please explain).

PDS_PROBLEM (13): Have you ever had a problem with the PDS shop?

1. Yes.
2. No.
PDS_PROB_WHEN (14 A): If yes, then when?
1. Always.

PDS_PROB_WHAT (14 B): What type of problem?
1. PDS shopkeeper favors dominant castes and discriminates the Dalits.
2. PDS shopkeeper treats the Dalits with disrespect and contempt during distribution.
3. The Dalits given less than others during distribution.
5. PDS items, instead of being made available to the Dalits are sold on black market or simply stolen by the PDS dealer and his accomplices.
6. PDS dealer refuses to give items to the Dalits.
7. The Dalits forbidden from entering or approaching the PDS shop, while the dominant castes are allowed.
8. The Dalits denied coupons, not given rations regularly.
9. The PDS shop is too far away (distance).

PDS_PROB_SOLVED (14 C): How was the problem solved?
1. Panchayat meeting.
2. Through the Dalit education/awareness.
3. Through administration (MRO, police, etc.).
4. Organized community confrontation with the PDS shopkeeper.
5. People’s support.
6. Compromise.

PDS_PROB Justiça (14 D): Were the Dalits able to achieve justice?
1. Yes.
2. No.
4. BPL - BELOW POVERTY LINE RATION CARD

SYSTEM BPL (1): Is there a BPL scheme in your village?
   1. Yes.
   2. No.

BPL_SC_TRUE (2): How many SC households are legitimately BPL? (How many SC households live below the Government-determined Poverty Line?)
   Numeric.

BPL_SC_DESIGNATED (3): How many SC households does the local BPL list actually recognize?
   Numeric.

BPL_SC_LEFTOUT (4): Are there SC households eligible for BPL that are left out of the BPL list due to caste discrimination?
   1. Yes.
   2. No.

BPL_NON_SC_TRUE (5): How many Non SC/ST households are legitimately BPL? (How many Non SC/ST households live below the Government-determined Poverty Line?)
   Numeric.

BPL_NON_SC_DESIGNATED (6): How many Non SC/ST households does the local BPL list actually recognize?
   Numeric.

BPL_NON_SC_BOGUS (7): Are there Non SC/STs who do not meet legitimate BPL criteria, but who are nonetheless, on the BPL list?
   1. Yes.
   2. No.

BPL_COMM_SCST (8): Are there SC/STs with the BPL identification committee?
   1. Yes.
   2. No.
BPL_DISC (9): Is there caste-based discrimination and exclusion of legitimate BPL people of SC/ST background by the identification committee?

1. Yes.
2. No.

BPL_DISC_WHY (10): If yes, then what is the reason?

1. Committee is dominated by dominant caste people.
2. Bribery by unqualified dominant caste people to get in BPL list.
3. Other reasons (please specify).
4. Both 1 and 2 (domination of committee and bribery).

BPL_REVISED (11): In your opinion, how should the method of BPL identification be revised?

No code. Answers, where given, collected in author’s notes.

BPL_SUFFICIENT (12): Is BPL assistance sufficient?

1. Yes.
2. No.

BPL_LIST (13): Has the Government announced or publicly posted the BPL list?

1. Yes.
2. No.

BPL_LIST_SEEN (14): Have you ever seen the BPL list?

1. Yes.
2. No.

BPL_COPY (15): Who has a copy of the BPL list?

1. Sarpanch.
2. PDS shopkeeper.
4. Other (please specify).
5. STARVATION

Please give a list of starvation deaths in this village for the years 2000, 2001, 2002 and 2003 to date. The list should identify the caste (SC, ST, and OBC, etc.), gender, age, and the economic background of the starvation victims and the date of death.

Numeric for number of starvation deaths in the village, when reported (rarely). For more details, see original survey forms.
Annexure II

1. Surveys excluded from the IIDS Study, after original data entry

Original Data Entry

Total number of surveys per state -

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<td>Andhra Pradesh</td>
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<td>Tamil Nadu</td>
<td>100</td>
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Bad Apples

Surveys excluded for the lack of information/incomplete questionnaires, suspect data or departure from methodology (i.e., reliance on the Non-Dalit sources) -

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Final Data

Total number of Surveys per State after excluding bad samples -

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### Excluded Surveys (Bad Apples) -

**State Survey number (on numbering system as per original data entry)
Why Excluded**

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<td>Skimpy information</td>
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<td>Suspect data (double of another village’s data)</td>
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